



GLEND A JACKSON

The Romantic Englishwoman

Joseph Losey on 'The Romantic Englishwoman'

You made some changes from Thomas Wiseman's novel.

What interested me most about it were the various points of view – the fantasy of the husband about his wife, the fantasy of the wife about herself, plus the catalyst of the poet, who says very little but is the only one who really has an articulate philosophy. Wiseman did an original script with me which was interesting and good in many ways, but like many novelists he was inclined to put into the script purple descriptions that are not so easily translated into the visual. Then Tom Stoppard took it and treated it with a good deal of irreverence and made it quite funny. He hardly changed the structure, except that he injected a bit more of the adventurer into the poet, but he largely rewrote the dialogue. It's a pretty bitter comedy of domestic life, and it could be like a more conventional *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*; considerably more conventional, I'm afraid. I persuaded Tom Stoppard with some difficulty, because he said that this is just the kind of thing he detests. But that was fine, that was exactly the way to do it, because taking something that he detested, he brought out all the best things in it.

The book is largely written from the viewpoint of the novelist husband. In fact, Wiseman makes extended use of a literary device, establishing the writer as the controlling presence who creates the other characters and is then gradually hounded by them as they take over his fictions.

In the film, we've made it clear that he's a pretty bad writer. He's not a bad person, and in fact he comes out rather well, but he's basically a successful pulp writer who believes his own fiction. For all his philosophising, he's a man who doesn't really create life but simply sets it down as he sees it, which of course is an immediate distortion because he doesn't see it with any degree of perspective. In the film he's not writing a book but a screenplay, about what he imagines happened to his wife in Baden Baden. There are a few illustrations of the screenplay, and they're all very Hollywood, very glittery and lush and overblown.

How have you dealt with the business of the novelist's relationship with the other two characters, both as real people and as characters in his own fiction, the switches of viewpoint and interior monologue?

There is no interior monologue at all. You see a woman in a situation, and the man projected rather ambiguously into some kind of relationship with her which you're not quite sure about, and then the husband is introduced. You see the domestic situation, and then you see this stranger more or less accidentally reappearing in their lives and being invited in by the writer for his sexual and pseudo-creative purposes. Then the wife turning that into a reality; and then the total necessity for everyone to confront this rather grubby reality.

Whom do you take to be the focal character?

I think the most interesting character is the poet. He comes out with more dignity at the end; he dismisses the others. He is someone who's totally free of bourgeois life, whereas they're totally trapped in it. There's a marvellous Tom Stoppard line, on the first night at the house when the poet has had a very good tea and a very good dinner but hasn't yet been invited to spend the night. He has been offered cigars and brandy, and the husband says, 'So bourgeois life does have its compensations.' And the poet says, 'What would it be without them?' The poet is represented in the film at the end as being nothing. There's nothing in his bag; there are just some notebooks on which there are a few scribbled lines, but most of the pages are empty.

I think that Wiseman in the novel is extremely unfair to the woman, and probably unfair to the poet. In the film the poet comes off best and the novelist next best and the woman worst; and I'm sorry in a way that it works out like this, because I'm not – in spite of my reputation – anti-woman.

Did the development of her part have any connection in your mind with A Doll's House?

Yes, but not in the way I wanted. I like *A Doll's House*, although the experience was not a very good one, and I didn't want to do anything after *A Doll's House* that could contribute to the wrong ideas about it. But the point of view which is in both the film and the novel is that the romantic Englishwoman was voracious – she wanted everything, and her idea of romance was total bourgeois consumption of man.

In the book, the husband obviously sees himself as a romantic novelist in the 19th century tradition, which you've put in quite a different context. How do you see this in relation to the statement you've made that you're basically a romantic?

I've said jokingly that I'm a romantic Marxist. I never meant romantic straight, and I think I was talking in terms of weaknesses not strength. And I'm quite sure that Tom Wiseman's title is ironic, as the film is ironic in relation to the title: if ever there was an unromantic woman, it's this one. In fact, it's a weakness of me and Thomas Wiseman and a lot of other people; you're trying to be realists in a systematised world, and you've been given a bourgeois romantic upbringing and education, and so you are in conflict all the time ...

It's probably wrong to talk about it before I know whether it works, but there is one thing in *The Romantic Englishwoman* ... In the scenes in the house at Weybridge (it's Weybridge in the film, not Hampstead), almost every sequence involves a mirror or a reflection, because I wanted to convey that their reality was totally unreal. I said that I was going to use mirrors to death in the house, and that I wouldn't use them anywhere outside it – and I succeeded until I got to the Baden Baden casino, where there were so many mirrors that there was no way of avoiding them.

Interview by Richard Combs, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1975

THE ROMANTIC ENGLISHWOMAN

Directed by: Joseph Losey
©: National Film Trustee Company Ltd
Production Companies: Dial Films, Méric-Matalon
Presented by: Daniel M. Angel
A Fox-Rank release
Produced by: Daniel M. Angel
Associate Producer: Richard F. Dalton
Assistant Director: Anthony Waye
Continuity: Pamela Davies
Casting: Mary Selway
Screenplay by: Tom Stoppard, Thomas Wiseman
From the novel by: Thomas Wiseman
Director of Photography: Gerry Fisher
Camera Operator: Gerry Anstiss
Editor: Reginald Beck
Assistant Editor: Michael Ellis
Production Designer: Richard MacDonald
Assistant Art Director: Richard Rambaut
Production Buyer: Jill Quertier
Costume Designer: Ruth Myers
Costume Supervisor: Elsa Fennell
Make-up Artists: Bob Lawrence, Philip Leakey
Hairdresser: Anne McFadyen
Filmed with: Panavision Equipment
Processed by: Rank Film Laboratories
Music Composed, Conducted and Arranged by: Richard Hartley
Sound Recordists: Peter Handford, Gerry Humphreys
Dubbing Editor: Peter Horrocks

uncredited
Assistant Director: Yves Amoureux
2nd Assistant Director: Gerry Gavigan
3rd Assistant Director: Peter Waller
Location Unit Director: Terry Hodginkson
Stills: Barrie Payne
Costume Designer for Glenda Jackson: Alice Pollack
Colour by: Eastmancolor
Foley Editor: John Ireland

Cast

Glenda Jackson (*Elizabeth Fielding*)
Michael Caine (*Lewis Fielding*)
Helmut Berger (*Thomas Hursa*)
Michel Lonsdale (*Swan*)
Béatrice Romand (*Catherine*)
Kate Nelligan (*Isabel*)
Nathalie Delon (*Miranda*)
Rene Kolldehoff (*Herman*)
Anna Steele (*Annie*)
Marcus Richardson (*David Fielding*)
Julie Peasgood (*new nanny*)
Frankie Jordan (*supermarket cashier*)
Tom Chatto (*neighbour*)
Frances Tomelty (*airport shop assistant*)
Lillias Walker (*1st mealticket lady*)
Doris Nolan (*2nd mealticket lady*)
Phil Brown (*Mr Wilson*)
Marcella Markham (*Mrs Wilson*)
Norman Scafe (*head waiter*)
Bill Wallis (*Hendrik*)
David De Keyser (*George*)

uncredited
Margaret Rawlings (*distraught woman*)
Julie Green (*1st stripper*)
Yvonne Ocampo (*2nd stripper*)

UK-France 1975©
116 mins

GLEENDA JACKSON

Women in Love

Sat 2 Jul 17:40; Wed 13 Jul 20:30; Fri 15 Jul 20:30

Horror of Darkness + Let's Murder Vivaldi

Sun 3 Jul 15:20

Mary, Queen of Scots

Sun 3 Jul 18:15; Wed 20 Jul 20:30

Glenda Jackson in Conversation

Tue 5 Jul 18:15

Sunday Bloody Sunday

Tue 5 Jul 20:40; Sun 24 Jul 18:30

Hedda

Fri 8 Jul 18:00; Sat 16 Jul 16:30

A Touch of Class

Sat 9 Jul 15:15; Sat 23 Jul 20:45

The Romantic Englishwoman

Sun 10 Jul 18:10; Mon 18 Jul 20:40

Stevie

Thu 14 Jul 20:30; Sat 23 Jul 12:00

Hopscotch

Fri 15 Jul 18:00; Tue 26 Jul 20:40

House Calls

Sat 16 Jul 18:45; Fri 22 Jul 20:30

The Maids

Sat 16 Jul 20:50; Sun 24 Jul 15:50

The Rainbow

Tue 19 Jul 20:40; Sun 31 Jul 13:00

Giro City + Glenda Jackson & Politics (clip compilation)

Thu 21 Jul 17:50

Turtle Diary

Thu 21 Jul 20:50; Fri 29 Jul 20:30

Strange Interlude

Sat 23 Jul 15:30

The House of Bernarda Alba

Mon 25 Jul 17:50

Elizabeth Is Missing

Fri 29 Jul 18:15

Elizabeth R (the complete series)

Eps 1-3 Sat 30 Jul 14:20; Eps 4-6 Sun 31 Jul 14:30

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